



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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# First Stage brings Tolkien's epic tale **THE HOBBIT** to Milwaukee Youth Arts Center

*-An immersive theatrical experience featuring 5 actors, 1 musician and 32 characters-*

**Milwaukee, WI – January 18, 2022** – First Stage's next offering in the new year is a thrilling production of **THE HOBBIT**, based on the book *The Hobbit* by **J.R.R. Tolkien** and adapted for the stage by **Greg Banks** and directed by Artistic Director **Jeff Frank**. An unlikely hero, Bilbo Baggins, would much rather be sitting in their cozy Hobbit Hole with a cup of tea and a plate of bacon and eggs. However, they somehow find themselves on a magically mystical adventure. Staged with speed and surprises, audiences will be delighted as things change before their eyes. Discover what happens as Bilbo travels on an epic journey over freezing mountains and through a frightening forest, meeting all sorts of fierce creatures – some who want to eat them, others who turn into dear friends. This will be a theatrical experience not to be missed!

**THE HOBBIT** runs **February 3 – March 5, 2023** in the newly remodeled Goodman Mainstage Hall at **Milwaukee Youth Arts Center**, located at 325 W. Walnut Street in downtown Milwaukee. Tickets are \$25. Tickets are available online at [firststage.org](http://firststage.org) or through the First Stage Box Office at (414) 267-2961. *Performance runtime is approximately 90 minutes, which includes a brief intermission. Suggested for families with young people ages 8+.*

From Artistic Director/Director **Jeff Frank**: "Five actors. One musician. Thirty-two characters. Ninety minutes. One epic tale brought magically to life on a theatrical adventure unlike anything seen before at First Stage! I love the fast-paced, energetic adaptation by Greg Banks with actors switching characters at the drop of a hat or the donning of a costume piece. He has

distilled the adventure to its essential elements and the audience is quickly swept up along with Bilbo. The intimate nature of the Goodman Mainstage Hall with the audience surrounding the stage, invites them to join Bilbo's adventure. I envision the production set in the broken down, war-ravaged remains of a library. When reason has left us and greed and a lust for power have taken over – the pillars of society have crumbled – knowledge, truth, self-growth, empathy and understanding that our stories have provided us have been lost and must be looked to again. Bilbo shows us that courage is about taking on a challenge despite our fears and reminds us what it means to be a friend. They are the hero we all long to be.”

## **BIOGRAPHIES**

**Jeff Frank (Artistic Director/Director)** is recognized as one of the top directors in the field with an expertise in developing new work for theater for the young audience field, Jeff holds a BFA in Theater from the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater and an MFA in Child Drama from the University of Utah. Having served as First Stage's Education and Academy Director from 1996 – 2003, Jeff remains committed to the power of theater to transform lives and is forever thankful to call First Stage home. Some of his favorite shows include: Roald Dahl's MATILDA The Musical, A MIDNIGHT CRY, LUCHADORA and GRETEL! Much love to his wife and children, who provide constant support and inspiration. Thank you for joining us for another season of inspiring and thought-provoking work. We ask you to lean in and discover the magic of theatre while learning more about your community and your world.

**Matt Daniels (Movement Coach)** is a frequent collaborator at First Stage, as an actor (A WRINKLE IN TIME, BIG RIVER, THE MIRACULOUS JOURNEY OF EDWARD TULANE, A CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS, ELLA ENCHANTED, SHREK THE MUSICAL and A MIDNIGHT CRY, among others), director and movement director (ELEPHANT AND PIGGIE'S "WE ARE IN A PLAY!", Roald Dahl's JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH, THE SNOW, RUDOLPH THE RED-NOSED REINDEER™: THE MUSICAL, among others), and Director of the Young Company, where he teaches and directs (THE MIRACLE WORKER, HENRY V, ANIMAL FARM, TXT U L8R and OUR TOWN, among others). Matt's other acting credits include appearances at Milwaukee Repertory Theater, (recently having appeared as Scrooge in The Rep's production of A CHRISTMAS CAROL), Skylight Music Theatre, Milwaukee Chamber Theatre, Milwaukee Opera Theatre, Renaissance Theaterworks, In Tandem Theater and Milwaukee Shakespeare, as well as Forward Theater, Kentucky Repertory Theatre, Lake Geneva Theater Company, several regional Shakespeare Festivals and on many independent stages in New York. In addition to First Stage, his directing work has been seen at Door Shakespeare, Marquette University, MCT's New Play Development series and in New York with his company Tyrannosaurus rep. When at home, he enjoys making music with Il Bazzone's Jumping Flea Circus. Matt is a graduate of the Juilliard School Drama Division.

[mattdanielsonline.com](http://mattdanielsonline.com)

## **ADULT CAST**

**Matt Daniels\*** (Thorin/Ensemble); **Jamey Feshold** (Killi/Ensemble); **Shammen McCune\*** (Gandalf/Ensemble); **Elyse Edelman\*** (Balin/Ensemble); **Natalie Ford\*** (Musician/Ensemble);

**Ken Miller** (Understudy for Matt Daniels); **Jake Badovski** (Understudy for Jamey Feshold); **Bree Kazinski** (Understudy for Shammen McCune) and **Ariana Manghera** (Understudy for Elyse Edelman).

\*Appearing through an Agreement between First Stage and Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

### **YOUNG PERFORMER CASTS**

Young Performer roles are double cast. The Young Performer in the Adventure Cast is **Leo Madson** (West Allis) as Bilbo Baggins.

The Young Performer in the Journey Cast is **Angel Rivera** (Milwaukee) as Bilbo Baggins.

Please note: To find which cast is performing on a specific performance day, please refer to the website on the show page located here: [firststage.org/events-tickets/2022-23-season/the-hobbit/](https://firststage.org/events-tickets/2022-23-season/the-hobbit/)

The Artistic Staff for **THE HOBBIT** includes: **Jeff Frank** (Director); **Matt Daniels\*** (Movement Coach); **Fernanda Douglas** (Composer); **Natalie Ford\*** (Music Director); **Shane O'Neil** (Lighting Designer); **Yvonne Miranda** (Costume Designer); **Nikki Kulas** (Props Designer); **Reed Davis\*** (Stage Manager) and **Carrie Johns** (Assistant Stage Manager).

\*Member of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States

**Tickets are \$25** – Tickets are available online at [firststage.org](https://firststage.org) or through the First Stage Box Office at (414) 267-2961.

**COVID Protocols:** First Stage is no longer requiring proof of vaccination upon arrival, and masks will be optional in the theater, unless the community level in Milwaukee County is rated in the High category, as determined by the CDC. First Stage COVID safety protocols and updates can be viewed here: [firststage.org/covid-19-safety-protocols/ - performances](https://firststage.org/covid-19-safety-protocols/-performances)

**Digital Playbill:** The digital playbill includes artistic/actor/designer and cast bios. To view the digital playbill when it gets posted closer to the show opening, please go to: [firststage.org/about-us/media-center/playbills/](https://firststage.org/about-us/media-center/playbills/)

**Please note:** Please refer to the digital playbill for updates on any cast changes as well as for the appropriate pronouns for actors.

**Google Drive:** Here is a link to Hobbit rehearsal shots, credits and the show logo:

[drive.google.com/drive/folders/1QvIsoj185ufg7IOjWXfUP4BW6iQtBEqa](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1QvIsoj185ufg7IOjWXfUP4BW6iQtBEqa)

**Enrichment Guide:** An Enrichment Guide for the production filled with fun and educational activities can be found here: [firststage.org/media/2anhaeof/hobbit\\_enrichmentguide.pdf](https://firststage.org/media/2anhaeof/hobbit_enrichmentguide.pdf)

### Special events for THE HOBBIT

**Pay What You Choose Performance: Friday, February 10, 2023 at 7:00 p.m.**

Pay What You Choose tickets are available on a first come, first served basis with a minimum suggested donation of \$5 per person. Doors open at 6:00 p.m. on the day of the performance. Patrons are encouraged to arrive early. Tickets may also be reserved in advance by phone at **(414) 267-2961**, weekdays 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. For more information, please visit: [firststage.org/events-tickets/tickets-offers/pay-what-you-choose/](https://firststage.org/events-tickets/tickets-offers/pay-what-you-choose/)

**Sensory Friendly Performance: Saturday, February 18, 2023 at 4:00 p.m.**

A Sensory Friendly Performance with accommodations for families with children on the autism spectrum will take place on Saturday, February 18, 2023 at 4:00 p.m. Sensory accommodations include a quiet area staffed by an experienced educator, lower sound, house lights up and more. Tickets for Sensory Friendly Performances are \$10. Order online or by phone at **(414) 267-2961**, weekdays 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. to reserve tickets. To learn more visit: [firststage.org/plan-your-visit/sensory-friendly-performances/](https://firststage.org/plan-your-visit/sensory-friendly-performances/).

**ASL Interpreted Performance: Sunday, March 5, 2023 at 4:00 p.m.**

This performance will be sign language interpreted for patrons who are deaf or hard of hearing. Assistive listening devices are also available at the Todd Wehr Theater. To learn more, please visit: [firststage.org/plan-your-visit/accessibility/sign-language-interpreted-performances/](https://firststage.org/plan-your-visit/accessibility/sign-language-interpreted-performances/)

## FACT SHEET

### **About: THE HOBBIT**

#### **THE HOBBIT**

Based on the book *The Hobbit* by **J.R.R. Tolkien**

Licensed by Middle-earth Enterprises

Adapted for the stage by **Greg Banks**

Produced by special arrangement with Plays for Young Audiences

Directed by **Jeff Frank**

**Location:** Goodman Mainstage Hall, Milwaukee Youth Arts Center, 325 W. Walnut Street, Milwaukee

**Live Performances: February 3 – March 5, 2023**

**Description:** Our unlikely hero, Bilbo Baggins, would much rather be sitting in their cozy Hobbit Hole with a cup of tea and a plate of bacon and eggs. However, they somehow find themselves on a magically mystical adventure. Staged with speed and surprises, you'll be delighted as things change before your very eyes. Discover what happens as Bilbo travels on an epic journey over freezing mountains and through a frightening forest, meeting all sorts of fierce creatures – some who want to eat them, others who turn into dear friends. *Performance runtime is approximately 90 minutes, which includes a brief intermission. Suggested for families with young people ages 8+.*

**Performances:**

- Friday, February 3 at 7:00 p.m. – *OPENING PERFORMANCE*
- Saturday, February 4 at 1:00 p.m. & 4:00 p.m.
- Sunday, February 5 at 1:00 p.m. & 4:00 p.m.
- Friday, February 10 at 7:00 p.m. – *PAY WHAT YOU CHOOSE PERFORMANCE*
- Saturday, February 11 at 1:00 p.m. & 4:00 p.m.
- Sunday, February 12 at 1:00 p.m.
- Friday, February 17 at 7:00 p.m.
- Saturday, February 18 at 1:00 p.m. & 4:00 p.m. – *SENSORY FRIENDLY PERFORMANCE AT 4:00 P.M.*
- Sunday, February 19 at 1:00 p.m. & 4:00 p.m.
- Friday, February 24 at 7:00 p.m.
- Saturday, February 25 at 1:00 p.m. & 4:00 p.m.
- Sunday, February 26 at 1:00 p.m. & 4:00 p.m.
- Friday, March 3 at 7:00 p.m.
- Saturday, March 4 at 1:00 p.m. & 4:00 p.m.
- Sunday, March 5 at 1:00 p.m. & 4:00 p.m. – *ASL PERFORMANCE AT 4:00 P.M.*

For more information, please visit [firststage.org](http://firststage.org) or call (414) 267-2961.

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**About First Stage**

Founded in 1987, First Stage is one of the nation's leading theaters for young people and families, and a driving force behind the creation of the best and most innovative plays for family audiences, theater training programs for young people and education initiatives for its schools and community. First Stage ensures that all programming is not only accessible to its community but that it is reflective of the community it serves.

First Stage produces plays that honor the young person's point of view, include diverse and traditionally underrepresented voices and inspire meaningful conversations. First Stage has presented more than 70 world premiere productions that address important subject matters relevant to today's youth. The Theater Academy is one of the nation's largest high-impact

theater training programs for young people (3-18 years old). Through a challenging curriculum taught by professional teaching artists, the Academy nurtures life skills through stage skills and includes the Next Steps Program that tailors Theater Academy classes to the needs of young people on the autism spectrum and with other developmental disabilities. As Wisconsin's leader in arts-integrated education in schools, First Stage's dynamic Theater in Education Programs cleverly blend theater activities with standard curriculum – allowing more than 10,000 students annually to learn traditional academic subjects through creativity and self-expression.

First Stage is a member of TYA/USA, the American Alliance for Theatre and Education, the Wisconsin Alliance for Arts Education, Milwaukee Arts Partners and is a cornerstone member of the United Performing Arts Fund (UPAF). [firststage.org](http://firststage.org)